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SUBJECT: RETIRED CADRES AIM TO SUPPORT PREMIER WEN THROUGH
POLITICAL REFORM PROPOSAL

REF: A. OSC CPP20090305786002

[1](#)B. BEIJING 520

[1](#)C. BEIJING 303

[1](#)D. 08 BEIJING 4644

[1](#)E. OSC CPP20090221708009

[1](#)F. BEIJING 633

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.
4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) A group of prominent retired cadres submitted a political reform proposal to the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) in January designed to support Premier Wen Jiabao, according to the daughter of the document's primary author, Li Rui, who was Mao Zedong's private secretary. Premier Wen, who is viewed by many reform intellectuals as the most "liberal" of China's senior leaders, reportedly does not enjoy broad political support among Party leaders and has "tense" relations with some because of his progressive views, which motivated Li Rui and others to try to assist him. The Communist Party's Central Organization Department approved the document for submission to the PBSC. The proposal calls for democratic decision making, public oversight to prevent misuse of China's fiscal stimulus plan, an open media and the development of civil society. Embassy contacts varied in their assessment of the proposal, which was posted on the Internet in February by its drafters, with most predicting it would have limited influence, even though compared to other "open letters" it would be taken more seriously by top leaders because of its authors' stature. End Summary.

"09 MEMORIAL": LIBERALS URGE POLITICAL REFORM

[1](#)2. (C) Sixteen prominent Party intellectuals and retired officials sent a proposal to Party General Secretary Hu Jintao and the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) on January 20, advocating that the long-term solution to the current economic crisis should include political reform, according to Li Nanyang (protect), daughter of the document's chief drafter, Li Rui. (Note: Li Rui, who was Mao Zedong's private secretary and deputy director of the CCP Central Organization Department, is well-known for his reformist views.) In meetings with PolOff on February 25 and March 6, Li Nanyang said the proposal was posted to the Internet by the drafters on February 20, prompting an immediate directive from the Beijing City office that monitors the ordering webmasters to remove it (see ref A for translation of the document from the website of the Hong Kong anti-Party journal Cheng Ming). Entitled "An Opinion on Overcoming Economic Difficulties and Establishing a New Situation in Reform," the document was quickly dubbed the "09 Memorial" (lingjiu shangshu) by netizens. (Note: "Memorial" refers to the practice during dynastic times of high officials submitting documents to superiors or "memorializing" the emperor.) In addition to Li Rui, the Memorial was signed by other influential retired officials and intellectuals, including former Central Propaganda Department Director Zhu Houze, liberal government economist Gao Shangquan and former Deputy Director of the official state news agency Xinhua, Lu Pu. Many of them are affiliated with the pro-reform history

journal Yanhuang Chunqiu (informal translation, "Annals of the Chinese Nation") (refs B and D).

13. (SBU) The Memorial is addressed to "Comrade Hu Jintao and the Comrades of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau," from "we veteran Party members in our 80s and 90s." The Memorial argues that China cannot cope with the current financial crisis or solve its long-term economic problems without considerable liberalization of its political system, including opening the media. Underscoring the "loyalty" of the authors to the Party and their "full support" of both China's current stimulus package to deal with the financial crisis and Hu Jintao's commitment to "fearlessly advancing the cause of reform, opening up and socialist modernization," the Memorial pointedly notes that political reform "lags seriously behind" economic reform with resulting "rampant corruption," income gaps and other social ills that have "brought great harm to the Party and people."

AIMING TO SUPPORT PREMIER WEN JIABAO

14. (C) A major objective of the Memorial was to support the views of Premier Wen Jiabao, whom many reform intellectuals see as the most "liberal" member of the PBSC, Li Rui related to his daughter. The Memorial is laced with calls for "democracy, transparency and public supervision," themes closely associated with Wen, according to Li Nanyang. She claimed that if Wen had free rein to act on his political views, he would "open up the media," allow more space for public expression and support more far-reaching political reform than his peers on the PBSC.

15. (C) Premier Wen did not enjoy much political support, Li Nanyang said, claiming that there was "tension" between him and some other leaders, not because he was a poor economic manager, as many rumors claimed, but because of Wen's more "liberal" political views. It was for this reason that her father Li Rui and others wanted to help Wen as much as they could. (Comment: A range of Embassy contacts has reported recently to PolOffs that Premier Wen is under "criticism" and "pressure" from a variety of sources, reportedly due both to his management of the economy and his political views. Contacts have nonetheless unanimously asserted that Wen's position within the leadership is "secure.")

16. (C) Despite his pro-reform views, Wen did not represent the faction of former Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang within the leadership and was generally not liked by Zhao's followers, according to Li Nanyang. The "Zhao group," Li said, blamed Wen for "abandoning" Zhao when the former General Secretary was purged during the Tiananmen democracy protest in 1989. (Note: As chief of the Party's General Office and a Zhao ally at the time, Wen accompanied Zhao to Tiananmen Square on May 19, 1989, when under the glare of television lights, Zhao tearfully told the demonstrating students that he had "come too late.") Li said the Premier was responsible for managing the economy and "doing something real" and Wen occupied that position because he could "get the job done." In China's Leninist system, she said, people of real talent could not rise to the top, but "relatively able" people could, with Wen being a prime example.

CALL FOR DEMOCRACY, OPEN MEDIA, CIVIL SOCIETY

17. (SBU) Employing a respectful tone throughout but urging changes beneficial for the Party and the country, the Memorial offered a series of "suggestions" on the following political reforms:

1A. Democratic process: To prevent corruption in allocating funds in the fiscal stimulus package, the Party must implement "real and effective democratic procedures" such as allowing "all parties and social groups" to participate in "the entire process" of deciding how to spend the money.

1B. Open media: The entire decision-making process must be

"open and transparent," including being "open to all media," and "the media must be encouraged and enjoined to track and report on it." The Party must "absolutely prohibit shutting out or pressuring the media."

-- The Party's "successful experience" in allowing open reporting during the Sichuan earthquake brought great benefit to the Party and did not undermine its power; this model should be applied to the current economic crisis and be "standardized and systematized." This approach is consistent with a Central Propaganda Department "lessons learned" report on news reporting in 2008, which concluded that "the degree of transparency determines the degree of public credibility."

-- Internal reports by journalists on leaders do not have to be submitted to the leader in question or his superiors and "may be reported directly" to central authorities.

¶C. Civil society: The Party should expand the "space" for "non-official social organizations of all kinds" and "protect the independent development of private organizations." The Sichuan earthquake experience, in which civic and private charitable organizations and NGOs played a positive and significant role, and the Party's handling of the 2008 Chongqing taxi strike in which the government "was a neutral mediator," should be "applied widely." This is the most effective route to "prolonged political stability."

¶D. Party "Work Style": "Bureaucratic and formulaic speech" and frequent references to "important instructions and speeches" should be eliminated and limits should be placed on spending public funds on travel and banquets. In particular, the "appallingly high" salaries of State-owned Enterprise managers should be reduced to show they are "weathering tough times along with the people."

¶8. (C) The Memorial calls for the re-establishment of a political reform group set up in the 1980s by two reform-oriented Party General Secretaries who were later purged by Deng Xiaoping, Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, although the document does not mention either leader by name. It states that "the Central Leading Group on Systemic Reform set up in 1986" (when Hu Yaobang was General Secretary) should be "restored," and the political report to the 13th Party Congress (known as the political reform Congress that appointed Zhao Ziyang Party General Secretary in 1987) should be the "foundation" for establishing a "fundamental system" that can "constrain power."

MEMORIAL SUBMITTED TO PBSC, PUBLIC AWARENESS LIMITED

¶9. (C) According to Li Nanyang, her father was required to route his messages to the PBSC through the Party's Central Organization Department, and Li Rui had told his daughter that in this case the Memorial had, in fact, been approved by the Organization Department for submission to the Party's top leaders. (Note: Per ref B, although Li Rui previously enjoyed direct access to the PBSC, he is now required to obtain approval from the Central Organization Department for all of his communications with Zhongnanhai.) Li Nanyang agreed that a document as sensitive as the Memorial from high-ranking cadres would most likely have been approved for submission by Politburo Member and Director of the Central Organization Department, Li Yuanchao.

¶10. (C) Embassy contacts differed in their awareness and assessment of the Memorial. While December's "Charter 08" may be the more "historic" document (ref C), the "09 Memorial" had more "practical value," Lu Yuegang (protect), journalist for the Communist Youth League's China Youth Daily, told PolOff March 12. The Memorial discussed issues within the framework of the current system and raised suggestions that were at least possible within the current political framework, Lu said, even if President Hu Jintao and the top leadership were unlikely to follow through. In Lu's view, the Yanhuang Chunqiu group to which Li Rui belongs represented a voice, but did not reflect a mainstream view.

To the extent that Wen Jiabao was a more open (kai ming) and moderate (wen he) leader, the 09 Memorial was supportive of him, as its themes echoed ideas thought to be associated with Wen. Zhou Xiaozheng of Renmin University (protect), separately concurred, telling PolOff March 16 that he was "not very familiar" with the 09 Memorial but that "any letter from Li Rui and the figures associated with Yanhuang Chunqiu" would be more influential than Charter 08. Such old guard pro-reformers had some influence with Party leaders even though their impact remained "limited." Unlike the far left, the reformers did have their own publication, Yanhuang Chunqiu. Although its circulation was small -- only about 80,000 -- many of its articles were picked up by others, and the journal's controversial articles were given exposure on its own website, Zhou stated.

¶11. (C) Sounding a more positive note, Zhang Xiantang (protect), senior reporter at the China Economic Times, the newspaper of the State Council Development Research Center, asserted to PolOffs March 18 that Li Rui and like-minded intellectuals associated with Yanhuang Chunqiu were "highly influential," as demonstrated by the journal's "largely successful" weathering of the criticisms leveled against it by former Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin (ref B). Zhang predicted the group's Memorial would have a "certain amount of influence" on the leadership, even though it was "clear" there would be "no real political reform" prior to 2012, as demonstrated by National People's Congress (NPC) Chairman Wu Bangguo's March 9 speech to the NPC (ref F). Professor Dong Lisheng (protect) of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences separately told PolOffs March 18 that the "09 Memorial" represented an increased effort by voices "on both the left and right" to influence the central leadership during an "increasingly tense year." Tang Jun (protect), Director of The Beijing Center for Policy Research, which serves as the Carter Center's office in Beijing, told PolOffs March 18 that she had read the Memorial and found it "significant" but, because she had seen no specific Party guidance on how to treat it and was concerned by its "sensitivity," had posted the Memorial on a "backup" server of her center's website where it could not be easily seen.

¶12. (C) Voicing a pessimistic view of the Memorial's influence in a meeting with PolOff on March 11, journalist Wang Chong (protect), formerly of the China Youth Daily, said he was not familiar with the details of the 09 Memorial but was generally dismissive of the retired cadres who run Yanhuang Chunqiu. Open letters like the 09 Memorial and Charter 08 tended to be "useless" (mei yong), he asserted, because they did not have a lasting impact. The Yanhuang Chunqiu cadres got away with being outspoken because they were retired and had "nothing to fear." But for the same reasons, they lacked any real influence. Western observers paid a lot of attention to Yanhuang Chunqiu because it was so outspoken and unique, but its real influence was limited, Wang Chong concluded. On March 17, Wang Changjiang (protect), chief of the Central Party School's "Party Building" department, commented to PolOffs that he was "aware" of the document but "had not read it." The leadership was less likely to respond negatively to such proposals if they did not advocate the adoption of Western models, Wang Changjiang concluded.

ORDERLY PROGRESS TO ENSURE CITIZEN RIGHTS

¶13. (SBU) The Memorial concluded with a quote from Premier Wen Jiabao stressing that "the more difficult and complex the situation, the more we must strengthen democratic decision-making, enhance the transparency of decision-making and strengthen democratic supervision." "Democracy, transparency, supervision, these three words," it said, embody the essence of the principles adopted by the Party's 17th Congress in 2007. Progress toward governing on behalf of the people and ensuring citizen rights, it said, cannot be "too bold" but would succeed if pursued in a "methodical, gradual and orderly" way under Party leadership. Addressing General Secretary Hu Jintao and the entire Politburo Standing

Committee, the Memorial closed with the declaration, "The people now stand by your side and veteran cadres stand by your side.... The Party will be victorious."

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